



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY



January 23, 2018

The Honorable Vicki Marble
Chair
State, Veterans, and Military
Affairs Committee
Colorado Senate
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203

The Honorable Jerry Sonnenberg
Vice Chair
State, Veterans, and Military
Affairs Committee
Colorado Senate
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Chairwoman Marble and Vice Chairman Sonnenberg:

As representatives of leading public health and safety organizations working to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries and contain crash costs, we urge you to support Senate Bill (SB) 49. This legislation will improve safety on Colorado’s roads by broadening the current prohibition on drivers from using wireless communication devices to read, write or send text messages while operating a motor vehicle to include the expanded uses of portable electronic devices that have emerged as the technology develops. Considering the prevalence of distracted driving crashes, this legislation is critical, responsive and timely.

Each day, distracted drivers cause on average 40 crashes in Colorado according to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). In 2016, distraction killed 67 people on Colorado roads (CDOT). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2015 alone, 3,477 people were killed and 391,000 more were injured in distracted driving crashes across the nation. Additionally, it is important to note these figures are known to be under-reported due to numerous challenges including differences in police crash report coding and database limitations. More can and should be done to eradicate driver distraction.

As wireless communication technology has developed from cellphones to smart phones that are in actuality miniature computers, and the range of electronic communication platforms has significantly broadened to include apps, social media, gaming, etc., laws curbing driver distraction must be updated to keep pace with the technology. We know that sending or receiving a text message causes a driver’s eyes to be off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. When driving 55 miles per hour, that time period is equivalent to driving the entire length of a football field while wearing a blindfold (Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI)). Filming oneself behind the wheel, taking photos, gaming and using apps to communicate is also highly distracting and takes the driver’s eyes off the road and their mind off the task of driving. Moreover, at any given moment during daylight driving, 660,000 drivers are using cell phones or manipulating electronic communication devices while driving nationwide, according to NHTSA.

Distracted driving not only results in crashes, deaths and injuries, but it also unnecessarily expends taxpayer dollars. Crashes in which at least one driver was identified as being distracted cost \$40 billion annually (NHTSA). Nationally, distracted driver crashes cost businesses \$8.2 billion in 2013 (Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, 2016). The annual economic costs of all crashes in Colorado are over \$4.1 billion (NHTSA).

In 2017, 629 people were killed on Colorado roads (CDOT), marking the largest number of annual traffic deaths in the last ten years (NHTSA). We urge you to support SB 49, a critical measure to curb dangerous and deadly distracted driving.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Knight, MD, FACS
President, Colorado Chapter
American College of Surgeons

Jean Schuppe MSN, RN, CEN
Colorado State President
Emergency Nurses Association

Julie A. Dunn, MD, MS, FACS
Medical Director of Trauma Research
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cc: State, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committee Members